

- (b) a needle guard mounted on said needle and slidable along a portion of said needle between said proximal end and said change in axis, said needle guard being engageable with said change in axis such that the distal advancement of said needle guard is stopped at said change in axis, said needle guard having a needle trap for covering said sharpened distal end of said needle substantially coincident with when said needle guard engages said change in axis.

²
~~15.~~ (Amended) The needle protective device of Claim ~~14~~¹ wherein said needle trap of said needle guard is transitional between a first retracted configuration and a second operative configuration wherein said needle trap covers said sharpened distal end of said needle.

²
~~3~~¹⁵ (Amended) The needle protective device of Claim ~~15~~² wherein said needle trap is biased against said needle when said needle trap assumes said first retracted configuration.

⁴
~~17.~~ The needle protective device of Claim ~~14~~¹ wherein said needle is selected from the group consisting of an epidural needle, a blood collection needle, a biopsy needle, a Seldinger needle, a Huber needle, an aspirating needle, and a solid stylet.

⁵
~~18.~~ (Amended) The needle protective device of Claim ~~15~~² wherein when said needle trap transitions from said first retracted configuration to said second operative configuration, said needle guard subsequently engages with said change in axis.

⁶
~~19.~~ (Amended) The needle protective device of Claim ~~15~~² wherein when said needle guard is operative to engage with said change in axis, said needle trap subsequently transitions from said first retracted configuration to said second operative configuration.

⁷~~20~~. (Amended) The needle protector device of Claim ¹~~14~~ wherein said change in axis defines a change in profile, said change in profile being engageable with said needle guard.

^{B₁} ⁸~~21~~. (Amended) The needle protective device of Claim ⁷~~20~~ wherein said change in profile defined by said change in axis comprises at least one outwardly-bulging sidewall portion.

⁹~~22~~. (Amended) The needle protective device of Claim ⁷~~20~~ wherein said change in profile defined by said change in axis defines a recessed change in profile.

Please add the following new claim:

^{B₂} ¹⁰~~23~~. (Amended) The needle protective device of Claim ¹~~14~~ wherein said change of axis of said needle comprises a bend formed upon the length of said needle.
